

Orange and Union Streets Neighborhood Study  
Joseph West House  
17 Union Street  
Nantucket  
Nantucket County  
Massachusetts

HABS No. MASS-1060

HABS  
MASS  
10-NANT  
76E-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
ORANGE AND UNION STREETS NEIGHBORHOOD STUDY  
JOSEPH WEST HOUSE

HABS No. MASS-1060

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Location: 17 Union Street (on west side), Nantucket,  
Massachusetts

Present Owners: Paul H. and Diane C. Madden

Present Occupants: Paul H. and Diane C. Madden

Present Use: Dwelling

Brief Statement

of Significance: One of the several merchants' homes of same type  
of construction erected here on "madeland" about  
1800; part of the Orange and Union Streets Neigh-  
borhood Study (MASS-1014).

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners:

- 1801 -- Joseph West bought land from William Raymond,  
2nd, house-carpenter.
- 1802 -- Joseph West bought additional land from Richard  
Mitchell.
- 1817 -- Obed Cathcart, mariner, bought the property with  
dwelling, from John West, mariner, for \$1300.  
When he died he left it to Nancy M. Coffin, who  
in turn left it by will to her husband, Alfred M.  
Coffin.
- 1895 -- Home for Aged People in Winchester by deed from  
Alfred M. Coffin.
- 1895 -- Mary J. Gifford Smith by deed from Home for Aged  
People for \$600.
- 1917 -- William Jr. and Lulu F. Hall bought from Mary J.  
and Edwin R. Smith.
- 1954 -- Arthur A. and Jessie H. Stetson bought from William  
Hall Jr.
- 1967 to date -- Paul H. and Diane C. Madden bought from  
Arthur A. and Jessie H. Stetson.  
(Abstract: Records at Registry Deeds, Nantucket,  
Massachusetts)

2. Date of erection: c. 1802 (Abstract: Book 16, Page 469  
and Book 24, Page 231, Registry Deeds, Nantucket)

3. Architect: None

4. Original plans, construction, etc.: This house represents the early years of the 1800's when Island merchants and captains were building houses of two-story height, front and rear. It has a very high basement and high front stoop with steps approaching it at the side. Central chimney and door at one side of front, similar in style to houses at #13 and #15 Union Street. There is no roof walk on this house.
5. Notes on alterations and additions: An ell has been added at the back on the north side and house has been modernized.

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure:

In the 1730's Quaaty Bank, which extended much further to the eastward across what is now Union Street, was dug away, making several acres of new land in that area where this house was built. Union Street was first paved with cobblestones but these were covered in 1899 with bituminous concrete.

Joseph West who built the house was a whaleship captain. His wife Mary died in 1816 and the following year he sold his home to another captain, Obed Cathcart. Captain Cathcart made several whaling voyages to the Pacific between 1826 and 1838 on Ships Victory and Young Phenix out of New Bedford, and Elizabeth Starbuck and James Loper out of Nantucket. In 1850 he again went to sea as captain of Ship Ontario of Nantucket. This ship was condemned at Tahiti and the 700 barrels of sperm oil which had been taken were shipped to England.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old Views: Old photograph of Union Street in 106 Views of Nantucket by Robinson, 1911; old photograph in Brief Historical Data by Joseph Ellis Coffee Farnham, 1915.

Prepared by Mrs. Marie M. Coffin  
Nantucket, Massachusetts  
August 1970

PART II. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared as part of the Orange and Union Streets Neighborhood Study (MASS-1014) made in the summer of 1970 by the Historic American Buildings Survey on Nantucket, Massachusetts. This is the fifth summer project of a continuing HABS comprehensive survey of the early architecture and urban design of Nantucket financed by a grant from the Nantucket Historical Trust.

The project was under the general supervision of James C. Massey, Chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey. Project Director was Professor

F. Blair Reeves, A.I.A., of the University of Florida. Historical information was provided by Mrs. Marie M. Coffin of Nantucket, Massachusetts. Photographs are by Jack E. Boucher of Linwood, New Jersey. The material was edited for deposit in the Library of Congress by Mrs. Constance Werner Ramirez, August 1971.